

Southern Appalachian Creature Feature Podcasts

Kids Outside

Good morning and welcome to the Southern Appalachian Creature Feature. As we enter summer, this week we'll look at a growing movement to get kids outside.

We're blessed on our street with fourteen kids between 2 and 18, turning our residential street into an extension of everyone's living room. This year's crop of 17-year cicadas had everyone excited for a couple of weeks. Kids walked up and down the street, filling plastic containers with the abandoned shells of juvenile insects. Two year olds walked around pointing and announcing, "Look, there's a cicada." Older kids recruited unsuspecting adult cicadas into races up the big tree swing's rope. Holes dot all the yards on the street, where the insects emerged from spending the past 17 years underground, discarded exoskeletons can be found with every turn, and in the distance the animal's hum continues.

The emergence of this cicada generation provided another dimension to a neighborhood where kids spend most of their free time outside – sliding, swinging, or climbing, checking out tadpoles in the ponds, trying to sneak up on the neighborhood groundhog, or hanging from trees al la Indiana Jones, which is all fun and games until the whip breaks.

In 2005, Richard Louv's book, *The Last Child in the Woods* was published, examining the phenomena of children spending less and less time outdoors, with afternoons and weekends climbing trees giving way to computers and televisions. This book has spawned a movement, with efforts to get children outside initiated by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Forest Service, and parks, museums, and nature centers across the nation.

Getting outside doesn't have to mean setting aside a weekend, loading up the car and driving the family over to Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Yes, we're very fortunate in the Southern Appalachians to have an abundance of national forest and park land to enjoy. We also have state parks, city parks, nature centers and public gardens. But getting outside can also simply mean stepping into the backyard and watching bees come to the flowers. It can mean setting aside a section of the garden for the kids to plant and care for. And parents don't need to be able to identify every bird call, or even be able to pitch a tent. Being outside can be a learning endeavor for both parent and child.

It's summer, the cicadas are singing, the swimming holes beckon, the sun lingers into the evening, what better chance to start getting outside more, to dig in the dirt for earthworms, or wade in a stream looking for crayfish, or simply play hide and seek in the back yard.

For WNCW and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, this is Gary Peeples.